



FINDING YOUR NICHE

BY LAURA GRANIER, YOUNG LAWYERS CHAIR

“Some might say you ‘know it when you see it,’ but the simplest indicator may be that it doesn’t feel like work.”

So you’ve graduated from law school and you are ready, willing, and able to “get to it” and start doing what you have always dreamed of doing – being a great lawyer. Whether you have landed your paying job or not, at some level the question has probably crossed your mind: what will be your niche? Some say that in order to competently practice, you must find a few things that you do best and stick to those. Certainly you do not want to pigeonhole yourself into something too narrow or do so too soon. But you do want to think about what kind of lawyer you want to be when you grow up. Here are some suggested issues to evaluate when pondering this important question:

- What are your strengths and what do you want to do on a day-to-day basis? Do you long to be in a courtroom, or in hearings in front of a decision-maker, or do you prefer transactional work and making deals? Or maybe you’re interested in legislative work? One of the great things about your legal training is that the opportunities really are endless.
- Do you have a background in a particular area that is useful to a legal niche? My colleague who studied natural resources in undergraduate school has found a niche for himself in water and natural resource law. Some with scientific backgrounds may find themselves well suited for patent or intellectual property law. Some choose law as a second profession and have the benefit

of real-world experience from their previous career that is invaluable in a particular niche.

- What are you passionate about? Okay, I know, I sound like an idealist and for some, this may not immediately directly translate into a practice niche. But, it certainly is worth considering. I am passionate about education and making better opportunities available to our youth who, after all, are our future. After many years and thousands of hours of volunteer work, I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to incorporate this passion into my practice and work on education law issues for clients. Although it does not dominate my practice, it is exciting to be able to merge these two worlds together in a productive way. Let’s face it, in today’s world (fortunately for us lawyers) you need legal advice or analysis for just about everything. Okay, perhaps that’s a slight exaggeration, but really, your analytical skills and other skills you develop through your legal training and practice are helpful in many areas. So, what begins as volunteer work may help position you to incorporate something you love into your everyday practice.
- What do you see yourself doing in 10 years? Is the road you are on the right one to lead you to where you want to be? If not, consider change. Life is short. We all have to “pay our dues.” But, if you’re not gaining valuable experience and/or you cannot see how your



current work is going to get you to the goal line, stop and reassess.

- Finally, seize every opportunity you can to gain experience and expose yourself to different areas of the practice that may interest you. I believe this is critical, particularly in your first few years, to give you a good understanding of what it is you might like to do. How do you know when you have found a “good fit”? Some might say you “know it when you see it,” but the simplest indicator may be that it doesn’t feel like work. Even more than that, though, if it’s your true passion, you will find it exhilarating and truly fulfilling. You may even have that amazing feeling that this is what you were meant to do in life!

Finally, once you find your niche, or a few areas you want to focus on, take the time and go the extra mile to really educate yourself in that area. Look for articles, CLEs and other background materials that will help you become an expert in that field. Follow new developments and seek opportunities to develop your expertise and to market yourself through your own presentations and by maybe even authoring your own article. Remember, in the famous words of Mark Twain: in 20 years you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did. So go forth, and explore, dream and discover. **NL**



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